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Message Text

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ACTION EUR-12

INFO OCT-01 NEA-10 ISO-00 CIAE-00 PM-04 H-02 INR-07 L-03

NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 PRS-01 SP-02 SS-15 USIA-06 IO-13

EB-07 OMB-01 TRSE-00 ACDA-07 /097 W
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AMEMBASSY ROME
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EC BRUSSELS 291
USMISSION NATO
DIA
USCINCEUR
USDOCOSOUTH

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E.O. 11652: N/A
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MT
SUBJ: MINTOFF PRESS CONFERENCE

REF: VALLETTA 1087

1. SHORTLY AFTER TAKING THE OATH OF OFFICE AS PRIME MINISTER FOR ANOTHER FIVE YEARS (REFTEL), DOM MINTOFF HELD A PRESS CONFERENCE FOR THE FOREIGN JOURNALISTS WHO HAD COME TO MALTA TO COVER THE ELECTION. IT WAS OBVIOUS THAT MINTOFF WAS ANXIOUS TO COUNTERACT INTERNATIONAL PRESS REPORTS ON THE VIOLENCE WHICH HAD MARRED THE MALTESE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN, AS WELL AS TO GIVE THE ASSEMBLED CORRESPONDENTS THE IMPRESSION THAT HE WOULD BE A "REASONABLE", BUT FIRM, LEADER OF
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MALTA DURING HIS SECOND TERM OF OFFICE.

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2. MINTOFF BEGAN BY CONDEMNING THOSE WHO HAD RESORTED TO VIOLENCE DURING THE POLITICAL CAMPAIGN "AGAINST THE WILL OF HIS PARTY". HE SAID THEY HAD ONLY "DAMAGED THE IMAGE OF THE LABOR PARTY AND THE MALTESE PEOPLE", AND THAT ANYONE CAUGHT COMMITTING SUCH ACTS IN THE FUTURE WOULD HAVE TO SUFFER THE CONSEQUENCES. MINTOFF ADDED THAT THE POLICE WOULD BE INSTRUCTED TO DO THEIR DUTY TO PREVENT FURTHER VIOLENCE. (COMMENT: MINTOFF PERSONALLY SUPERVISES THE POLICE UNDER THE MALTESE GOVERNMENTAL SYSTEM. SO, IF HE MEANS WHAT HE SAYS, PERIODIC STREET RAMPAGES BY POLITICAL TOUGHS MAY INDEED FINALLY COME TO A HALT. END COMMENT)

3. MINTOFF POINTED WITH PRIDE TO THE RECENT ELECTION, SAYING THAT IT HAD BEEN HELD IN THE FAIREST MANNER POSSIBLE. NOW THAT THE ELECTION WAS OVER, HE WARNED THAT IT WAS "THE DUTY OF ALL TO ABIDE BY THE RULE OF THE MAJORITY." "THAT IS WHAT DEMOCRACY MEANS", HE ADDED. MINTOFF SAID HE EXPECTED THAT ALL MALTESE WOULD NOW SUPPORT THE DOMESTIC AND FOREIGN POLICIES ADVOCATED BY THE LABOR PARTY DURING THE ELECTION CAMPAIGN.

4. ON FOREIGN AFFAIRS, MINTOFF EMPHASIZED THAT THE ELECTION RESULT SHOWED THAT THE MAJORITY "DID NOT WANT MILITARY BASES IN MALTA AFTER 1979, NEITHER THOSE OF THE AMERICANS NOR THOSE OF THE RUSSIANS." RATHER, HE SAID, IT WAS THE WISH OF THE MALTESE PEOPLE THAT "MALTA WOULD BE NEUTRAL AND WOULD HAVE ITS NEUTRALITY GUARANTEED BY EUROPEAN AND ARAB COUNTRIES."

5. BUT, HE ADDED, IN RECOGNITION OF "THE ROAD MALTA HAD TAKEN TOWARD NEUTRALITY AND ELIMINATION OF FOREIGN MILITARY BASES, NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES HAD A DUTY TO HELP MALTA SO THAT THE ISLAND WOULD NOT SUFFER AS A RESULT OF ITS STAND." IN OTHER WORDS, "MALTA'S ARAB AND EUROPEAN NEIGHBORS SHOULD ASSIST MALTA ECONOMICALLY." FOR HIS PART, MINTOFF SAID THE NEW LABOR GOVERNMENT WOULD ASSURE THAT "THE MALTESE CONTINUE TO GIVE THEIR SHARE TO HELP THEIR COUNTRY MOVE FORWARD IN PEACE." HE ALSO POINTED
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OUT THAT HE EXPECTED ALL THE MALTESE TO WORK HARDER TO HELP GENERATE GREATER DOMESTIC PROSPERITY AND A MORE EQUITABLE DISTRIBUTION OF SOCIAL BENEFITS DURING THE NEXT FIVE YEARS.

6. IN RESPONSE TO A QUESTION ABOUT HIS NON-ALIGNED POLITICAL POLICIES, MINTOFF OBJECTED TO THE FACT THAT INTERNATIONAL PRESS REPORTS WERE SAYING HE WAS "ANTI-

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AMERICAN AND ANTI-EUROPEAN". THIS WAS NOT TRUE, HE SAID. RATHER, "THE LABOR PARTY WAS MALTESE, AND THE MALTESE WERE PRO-ARAB AND PRO-EUROPEAN". "IF EUROPE CANNOT ACCEPT THIS, IT IS NOT MY FAULT," HE STRESSED.

7. INSTEAD OF BEING "ANTI-AMERICAN OR ANTI-RUSSIAN", MINTOFF SAID HE BELIEVED THAT "THE MEDITERRANEAN COULD BECOME THE CENTER OF A CONSTRUCTIVE POLICY OF PEACE." IN THIS CONTEXT, HE SAID THAT WHEN HE SPOKE ABOUT "A MEDITERRANEAN FREE FROM DOMINATION BY THE SOVIET UNION," HE "KNEW HE WAS FOLLOWING THE OBJECTIVES OF AMERICAN POLICY". HE ALSO SAID HE BELIEVED THAT THE "AIM OF AMERICAN POLICY WAS NOT TO DOMINATE THE MEDITERRANEAN AND NOT TO TURN US (THE MALTESE) INTO NEO-COLONIALISTS."

8. THE SAME APPLIED TO THE SOVIET UNION, MINTOFF SAID, WHOSE "STATED OBJECTIVES" ALSO WERE NOT TO DOMINATE THE MEDITERRANEAN. THEREFORE, "THE MALTESE WERE HELPING BOTH SIDES TO BUILD A NEW WORLD, AT LEAST IN THE MEDITERRANEAN".

9. MINTOFF CLAIMED THAT IF HIS PREVIOUS GOVERNMENT HAD DEVELOPED MORE RELATIONS WITH ARAB COUNTRIES THAN WITH EUROPEAN COUNTRIES, THIS WAS NOT MALTA'S FAULT. IF EUROPEAN COUNTRIES WANTED TO INVEST IN MALTA THEY WOULD BE WELCOME, BUT IF THE EUROPEAN INFLUENCE HERE HAD DIMINISHED OVER THE PAST FIVE YEARS, "THIS WAS ENTIRELY BECAUSE THE EUROPEANS WERE STUPID" AND HAD FAILED TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF THE OPPORTUNITIES WHICH HIS GOVERNMENT HAD OFFERED THEM. IN CONCLUSION, MINTOFF URGED THAT THE EUROPEANS, AS WELL AS THE ARABS, LOOK WITH GREATER FAVOR ON MALTA'S NEEDS IN THE FUTURE.

10. COMMENT: THIS WAS A TYPICAL, AND REVEALING, MINTOFFIAN
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PERFORMANCE. EVEN WHILE TRYING TO IMPRESS THE VISITING INTERNATIONAL CORRESPONDENTS WITH HIS REASONABLENESS AND DEDICATION AS MALTA'S CHOSEN LEADER, HE COULDN'T RESIST: (A) INDIRECTLY WARNING ALL MALTESE (AND ESPECIALLY THE DEFEATED NATIONALISTS) TO TOE THE LINE, OR ELSE; (B) LASHING OUT AT HIS FAVORITE WHIPPING BOYS (THE EUROPEANS) FOR BEING "STUPID" IN FAILING TO DO MORE FOR MALTA; AND (C) WARNING HIS SELF-NOMINATED EUROPEAN BENEFACTORS (FRANCE AND ITALY) THAT IT WILL BE THEIR "DUTY" TO SUPPORT MALTA ECONOMICALLY AFTER THE BRITISH LEAVE IN 1979. AND WHILE HE WAS AT IT, TO TAKE FULL CREDIT BOTH FOR WORKING TOWARD "PEACE" IN THE MEDITERRANEAN AND FOR SERVING AMERICAN AND

RUSSIAN "OBJECTIVES" AT THE SAME TIME, CAN ONLY BE DESCRIBED AS ANOTHER REFLECTION OF HIS GIANT SIZE EGO. FOR MINTOFF,

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AND MOST MALTESE, THE WORLD DEFINITELY REVOLVES AROUND THIS LITTLE ISLAND. HIS SECOND TERM AS PRIME MINISTER DOUBTLESS WILL FURNISH MANY MORE EXAMPLES OF THE EFFECTS ON OTHER GOVERNMENTS CAUSED BY THIS INCURABLE MINTOFFIAN DISEASE. END COMMENT. SMITH

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Message Attributes

Automatic Decaptioning: X
Capture Date: 01 JAN 1994
Channel Indicators: n/a
Current Classification: UNCLASSIFIED
Concepts: TEXT, PRESS CONFERENCES
Control Number: n/a
Copy: SINGLE
Draft Date: 24 SEP 1976
Decaption Date: 01 JAN 1960
Decaption Note:
Disposition Action: RELEASED
Disposition Approved on Date:
Disposition Authority: ElyME
Disposition Case Number: n/a
Disposition Comment: 25 YEAR REVIEW
Disposition Date: 28 MAY 2004
Disposition Event:
Disposition History: n/a
Disposition Reason:
Disposition Remarks:
Document Number: 1976VALLET01093
Document Source: CORE
Document Unique ID: 00
Drafter: n/a
Enclosure: n/a
Executive Order: N/A
Errors: N/A
Film Number: D760362-0339
From: VALLETTA
Handling Restrictions: n/a
Image Path:
ISecure: 1
Legacy Key: link1976/newtext/t19760921/aaaaarlj.tel
Line Count: 174
Locator: TEXT ON-LINE, ON MICROFILM
Office: ACTION EUR
Original Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Original Handling Restrictions: n/a
Original Previous Classification: n/a
Original Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Page Count: 4
Previous Channel Indicators: n/a
Previous Classification: LIMITED OFFICIAL USE
Previous Handling Restrictions: n/a
Reference: 76 VALLETTA 1087
Review Action: RELEASED, APPROVED
Review Authority: ElyME
Review Comment: n/a
Review Content Flags:
Review Date: 05 APR 2004
Review Event:
Review Exemptions: n/a
Review History: RELEASED <05 APR 2004 by BoyleJA>; APPROVED <11 AUG 2004 by ElyME>
Review Markings:

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04 MAY 2006

Review Media Identifier:
Review Referrals: n/a
Review Release Date: n/a
Review Release Event: n/a
Review Transfer Date:
Review Withdrawn Fields: n/a
Secure: OPEN
Status: NATIVE
Subject: MINTOFF PRESS CONFERENCE
TAGS: PINT, PFOR, MT, (MINTOFF, DOMINIC)
To: STATE
Type: TE
Markings: Margaret P. Grafeld Declassified/Released US Department of State EO Systematic Review 04 MAY 2006